

USE AND MANAGEMENT OF LANDSCAPE FOR TOURISM IN RURAL AREAS. THEORETICAL APPROACH AND EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS IN SOUTHEAST OF CASTILLA-LA MANCHA: ALBACETE

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I. LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT: AN INSTRUMENT FOR THE HARMONIZATION OF HUMAN ACTIVITY IN THE TERRITORY

The European Landscape Convention (ELC), signed in Florence in 2000, has resulted in a renewal of the hitherto existing theoretical and practical approaches in relation to the landscape. To the spatial extension of the concept (since it is considered landscape as *any* part of the territory), the temporary extension is added, as well as the implicit recognition that it is a result of history and, as such, a legacy. Among its objectives they insist on the need for management of the landscapes in the present to direct their future evolution. It also includes the perception of the population to identify landscapes, at the same time raising the need for the direct collaboration of all social groups in different phases of decision of any process that affects them. Citizen participation becomes the basis of the new social and subjective concept that characterizes the current legal treatment of the landscape in Europe.

From the ELC the practice of landscape policies has gone from basically aiming protection toward a new vision that focuses on the management and planning of the landscape as a part of the territory. It does not only focus on the past but in the present Government and the identification of its possibilities for the future. Thus the protective or reactive vision of outstanding and unique spaces is exceeded to adopt a proactive perspective that affects the whole country. This is why the nuclear element of landscape policy is the management of landscapes, understood as the process that wants to guide the transformations caused by human action and economic activities.

II. ADVANCES IN THE RECOGNITION AND MANAGEMENT OF THE LANDSCAPE IN SPAIN

The paper examines the progressive incorporation of the landscape to the Spanish legal framework from the signing of the ELC. Two stages are identified: from 2000 to 2008 (the year in which it enters into force in Spain), and from then to the present time. The first stage begins to incorporate the essential ideas of the European Treaty in various policy documents, even before its ratification. In the second stage, the principles of the ELC with the enactment of laws of landscape in different autonomous communities are applied and, in addition, with the integration of landscape in the schemes of planning of the greater part of the country.

In 2004 in Valencia and in Catalonia in 2005, even before the official ratification of the Convention, statements were made by the first laws of landscape. The Catalan initiative, which already has more than 10 years, has become a model to follow in many respects. The Valencian law was repealed in 2014, when a new standard of the Generalitat for the management of the territory, urban planning and landscape in the Valencian Community was promulgated.

From 2008 laws of landscape, or regulations dedicated to landscape management are, drafted in a growing number of autonomic region (Galicia in 2008; Andalusia in 2012; Cantabria and the Canary Islands in 2014; the Basque Country in 2015). In some of them specific laws have not been created but they have included the landscape within the rules of territorial planning (in the case of Aragon and Murcia), or in its natural character (Castilla-Leon). Castilla-La Mancha has been relegated as one of the regions where the regional administration has not done anything virtually in this sense yet. On the other hand, at this stage, management instruments at a state level are developed, such as the *National Plan of cultural landscape and the Strategic Plan of the Natural Heritage and Biodiversity 2011-17*.

III. LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT AND USE AS A TOURIST RESOURCE IN THE RURAL ENVIRONMENT: OPPORTUNITY AND CHALLENGE

Rural tourism is a complex term whose use has become widespread only three decades ago. As a general rule, it is organized from small installations, micro destinations and little structured products. These customers have different motivations, but in general they show a high sensitivity for the environment in which they are located, and they demand activities in contact with the nature, the local culture or the built heritage. This is a modality in accordance with local development strategies, since it increases and diversifies the incomes of residents, while contributing to the conservation of the environment. It is therefore a fundamental alternative to traditional precarious economies of agricultural areas, especially areas in the mountain.

There have been a series of change processes in the last two decades in Spain that, jointly, have made possible the development of rural tourism. On the one hand they are changes associated with the preferences of demand and, on the other, those that have been led to by European aid, channeled through the Community initiative LEADER and PRODER operational programme. These have served to enhance associationism, increase the pool of tourist accommodation, retrieve and promote the rural heritage, while contributing to the creation of new companies, the generation of employment, the complement of income, etc.

The rural landscape is undergoing deep transformations due to the abandonment of traditional activities and the introduction of new ones that, on numerous occasions, are related to its use for leisure and tourism. It has become a consumer product because it is basic material featuring intangible values associated with symbols and identity. It is a key element in creating visual imagery and tourist icons, and has ability to translate feelings and emotions to the individual. As a result of these processes, the landscape has become one of the major territorial potentials for rural tourism in Castilla-La Mancha and the province of Albacete.

IV. TERRITORY AND LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT IN RELATION TO RURAL TOURISM IN CASTILLA-LA MANCHA

The regional administration has not established a planning policy for Castilla-La Mancha. Due to this situation the European Union guidelines have had a very important role in the territorial articulation. Thanks to them there is, in fact, a subregional division formed by groups of municipalities created to participate in the community initiative LEADER (1991-94), later LEADER II and PRODER I (1994-1999), and later LEADER+ and PRODER II (2000-2006). From 2007 both programs were merged into the EAFRD (European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development). Ultimately, as a result of these actions a model of organization in sub regional areas emerged, which is the one that has been consolidated and could become the structure of spatial planning in Castilla-La Mancha.

The program LEADER of the European initiative in Castilla-La Mancha gave rise to 13 groups of rural development (3 of which are located in the province of Albacete). It has covered 449 municipalities, extended along 39.860 km², almost half of the regional area, and 30% of the population. Furthermore, the activities of the PRODER program have been channeled through 16 groups of rural development (three of them in the province of Albacete), which gathered a total of 433 municipalities, almost 50% of those in the community.

The incidence of these programs has been important in the region. On the one hand, due to the economic and environmental changes that have occurred thanks to received subsidies; on the other hand, because an administrative decentralization model supported by the participation of local communities has been spread from these initiatives, favouring the development of local base. In the 2000-2006 period most of the investments went to the consolidation and modernization of the agricultural sector (which took 61% of funds). Also projects aimed at diversifying the economic activity, led to what greatly boosted rural tourism (4% of the grants received), while 35% of the total is devoted to conservation of the landscape and heritage. In the last stage since 2007, the promotion of tourism has continued attracting grants for various projects, although it has changed its profile, given that the creation of equipment does not prevail.

Until the present time, in Castilla-La Mancha, in the absence of a specific law, unlike other autonomous communities, the landscape has only some recognition in sectoral rules in force, affecting the management of the territory, its rural development, the protection of the natural environment. However, some works have already been made, following the guidelines of the ELC, aimed at identifying the landscapes of the region, which has resulted in a landscape database that can be the basis for subsequent work. Part of this documentation has been published in the *Atlas of the landscapes of Castilla-La Mancha*.

V. THE TOURIST USE OF THE LANDSCAPE IN THE PROVINCE OF ALBACETE

Within the region, the province of Albacete concentrates most of the regional offer of rural tourism facilities, and also receives a significant part of the demand. The sector has presented a trend similar to that experienced at a national level. A steady growth in establishments and tourists can be seen up to the year 2012. Since then, we begin to perceive a change in the trend, very strong in the province, which suggests the exhaustion of a model that has worked with expansionary trends for two decades. This new situation will surely have associated adjustments in establishments and products offer.

V.1. The actions of the rural development groups in favor of the tourist and recreational use of the landscape

The use of European funds to promote tourism, as a way to diversify the local economy and get incomes, has resulted in numerous actions. Rural accommodation supply has increased; they have rehabilitated historic buildings and constructions, suitable spaces for leisure use, and they have promoted the tourism sector in the different counties by various means. Some of these actions have led to the recovery and protection of the landscape although they are not the most numerous. Among them, in the last period we have projects to fit the landscape for tourist use, and in particular, the creation of routes and itineraries to enjoy natural areas and the environment in general.

Thus, we get the recovery of livestock routes (cattle routes, paths and lanes), the conditioning and signposting of routes, the rehabilitation of old roads, the recovery of paths along the riverbanks, the creation of long-distance and short-distance trails, and the remodeling of viewpoints. They are strategies that have been emerging, promoted by different actors for the practice of hiking, cycling, horse riding, natural and cultural itineraries. All of them are aware of the importance of the landscape as a tourist resort, in line with the growing of collective ecological awareness increasingly more important in society, with the increase of sports and leisure demand, etc. In the province, several Local Action Groups have included landscape and tourism among the objectives of their rural development program. For example the *Program of the District of Sierra del Segura 2007-2013* which points to the landscape among its priorities, the *Mancha-Júcar Centre Strategic Plan*, or the *Strategic Plan of the district of Campos de Hellín 2007-13*.

Actions have also been developed thanks to Agenda 21, another locally-based initiative. This program in its task of awareness, participation and definition of objectives in the search of sustainability, has had an impact on improving the environment and landscape of the municipalities in many cases. The recovery of damaged areas, sometimes at risk of disappearing, has been a task directed by and for the local population, but it is clear that, on occasions, this may also have consequences for the tourism. More important than the specific effects, which evaluated together can be still limited, is the paradigm shift. The collaboration of residents is essential, since we aim to promote the sustainable development in a consensual and participatory way. This model and the practices it promotes open thus step to an active concern of citizens for the landscape in the line of what the ELC set, although it is true that it is still incipient.

V.2. The enhancement of the landscape in the province of Albacete through the creation of leisure trails

The traditional roads have been recognized not only as basic elements for the functioning and development of the rural communities, but as part of the local heritage and result of history and culture. Currently, old tracks for leisure and tourism use, especially in the highland regions of the province where they have strong landscape content, have been revitalized. Other axes of great value for its resources are linked to the river banks.

The promoters have been public institutions, groups of local development or private associations. In the province of Albacete the responsible entities for different actions have been: the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Environment; the Communities Committee of Castilla-La Mancha; groups of rural development; the Councils, and also non-profit associations.

Among the developed actions we enhance the national program *Natural Roads* for its pioneering character, which aims to create a network from the recovery of ancient rural roads for hiking, biking, or equestrian use. There are two great performances in the province. The first one is intended to recover the network of service roads of the old *Canales de Maria Cristina*, that used to drain the waters of the flooded areas to the South and West of the capital. The other one has allowed the recovery of the route of a former disused railway Baeza-Utiel, which passes through the province. The city of Albacete is connected with the historic core of Alcaraz through the 80 km of the *Vía Verde* (currently in process of enlargement).

The walking routes signposted have traditionally served as a starting point for sporting, tourist and recreational use of the landscape. They have taken action in the remodeling, signage and standardization of long-distance trails in the province: the Tres Calares Trail, GR 66 (Los Serranos Trail), GR 67 (El Mundo Trail) and GR 68 (Sierra del Segura Trail). Seven hiking routes within the Natural Park of the Calares, el Mundo and la Sima have been signposted and conditioned thanks to the initiative of the Communities Committee of Castilla-La Mancha.

Moreover, rural development groups have carried out different actions. The Group of Sierra del Segura has remodeled 24 viewpoints and designed a network of 20 routes (affecting trails of different types). La Manchuela group made the layout and signposting of three large trails, with tours of more than 100 km through the region. The Group of Sierra de Alcaraz and Campo de Montiel has designed and remodeled the *Vía Verde*, other 15 radials and complementary routes linking municipalities and cores near to this axis. Finally, in Mancha Júcar - Centro effort has also been made for the remodeling and signposting of a network of trails that runs along the riverbanks of the Júcar on its way.

Some local non-profit associations have also actively collaborated in this process (as in Paterna del Madera, where a network of 20 approved trails signposted has been recovered). Traditional users, neighbors, or amateur walkers become actors that promote and collaborate in the identification, marking and dissemination of the new routes.

Another axis is the supporting actions for the integrated development of the fluvial spaces, focusing on the landscape of the riverbanks (object of the performances of Eflus I and Eflus II, programs for the sustainable management of river spaces). In this case the projects affect the groups of La Manchuela and Mancha Júcar-Centro and the rivers Júcar and Cabriel.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

The work presents two confluent processes associated with the landscape and with effects on the territory of the province of Albacete. One is related to institutional and social recognition of the landscape, and the other one is related to the touristic use which is made of it. Landscape management has made a breakthrough in our country as a consequence of the effective implementation of the commitments made with the ratification of the ELC. So it is very obvious that in Castilla-La Mancha landscape and spatial planning does not still appear in regional legislative rules. The location of the landscape in Albacete is framed in this context of lack of regulation and planning.

On the other hand, we have verified that the landscape has an important role as a touristic resource in inland areas. In the case of the province of Albacete most of the municipalities, groups of local development and partnerships, with the support of provincial, regional or national administrations, have promoted initiatives to add value to the landscape and use it as a tourist resort. Possibly the most important initiatives are those related to the articulation of routes prepared for walkers and cyclists use. In this context there has been a growing sensitivity for landscape use, a very positive aspect, since it implies its revaluation, which must be supported and integrated in an appropriate landscape policy. We should highlight the role that local actors and citizens in general have had in these processes of promotion and use of the landscape as a resource for tourism.

These facts open a debate on the use of the landscape in the rural environment, which requires to take into account some of the problems arising from the lack of regulation. In short, the increased use of the landscape requires proper management procedures. In the case of the province of Albacete and Castilla-La Mancha there is a situation of misbalance between a growing use by society against an inadequate normative and regulatory interest of the regional administration.